

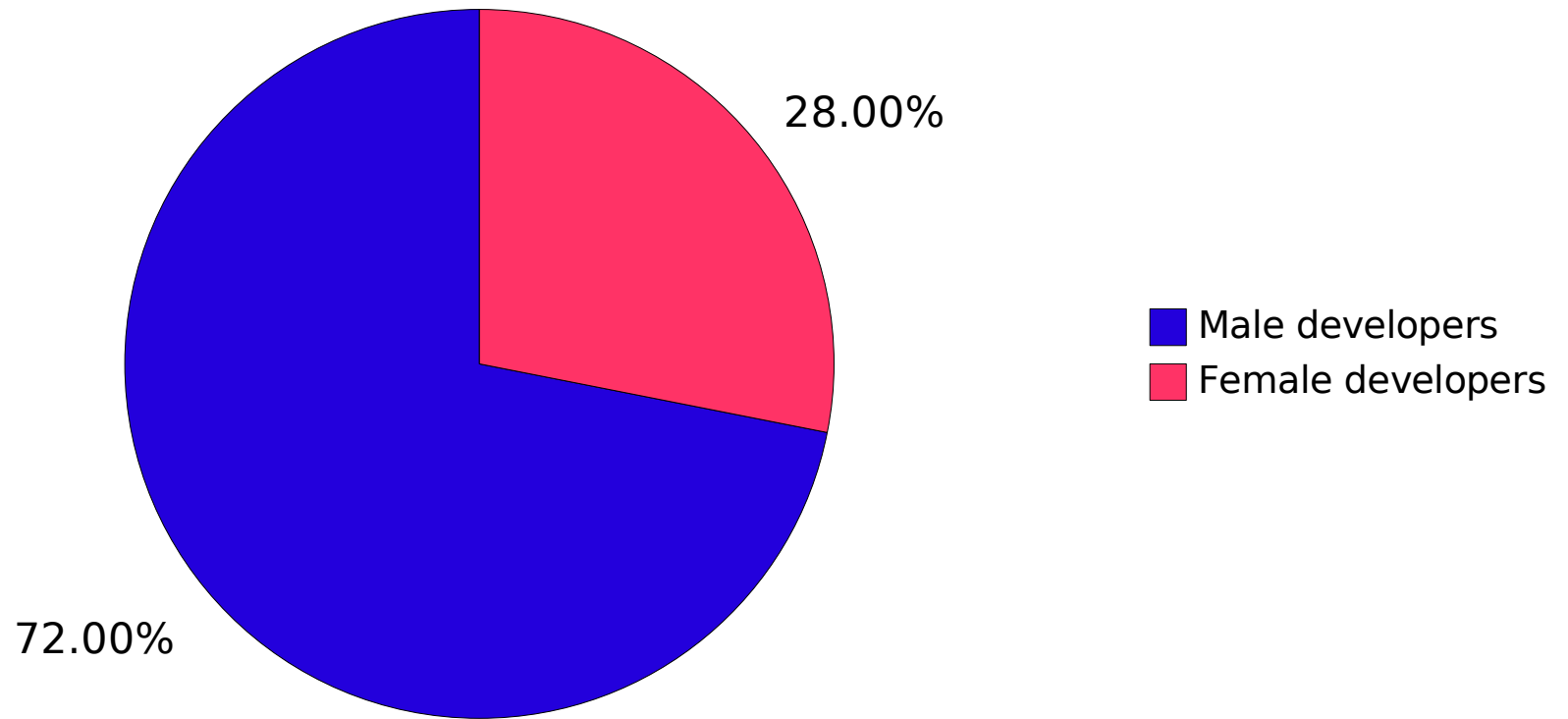
Women in Free Software: Findings from FLOSSPOOLS

Hanna Wallach

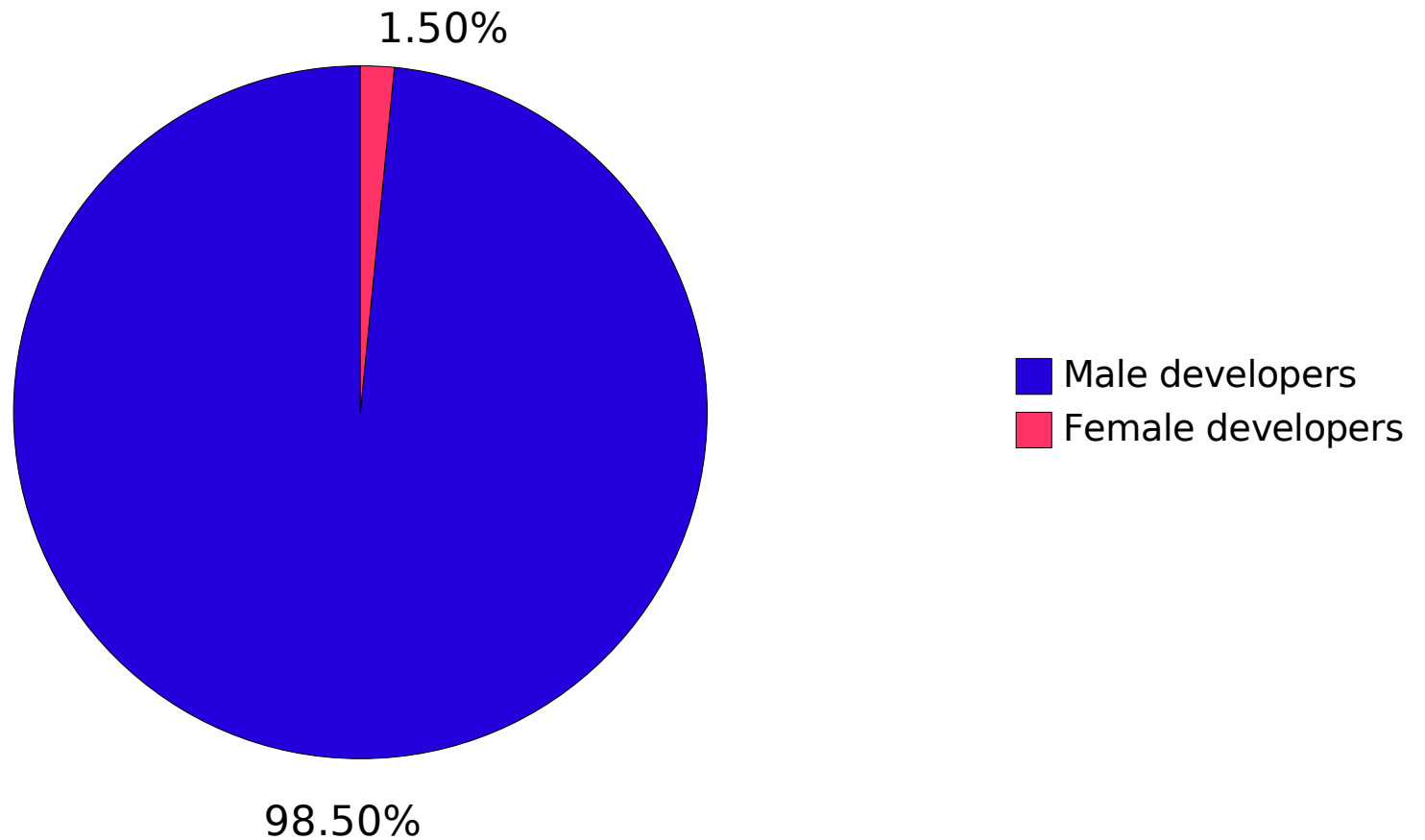
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Proprietary Software



Free Software



WHY?

FLOSSPOLS Project

- Studies on free/open source software
- Funded by the European Commission
- March 2004 to February 2006
- Three strands: one on gender

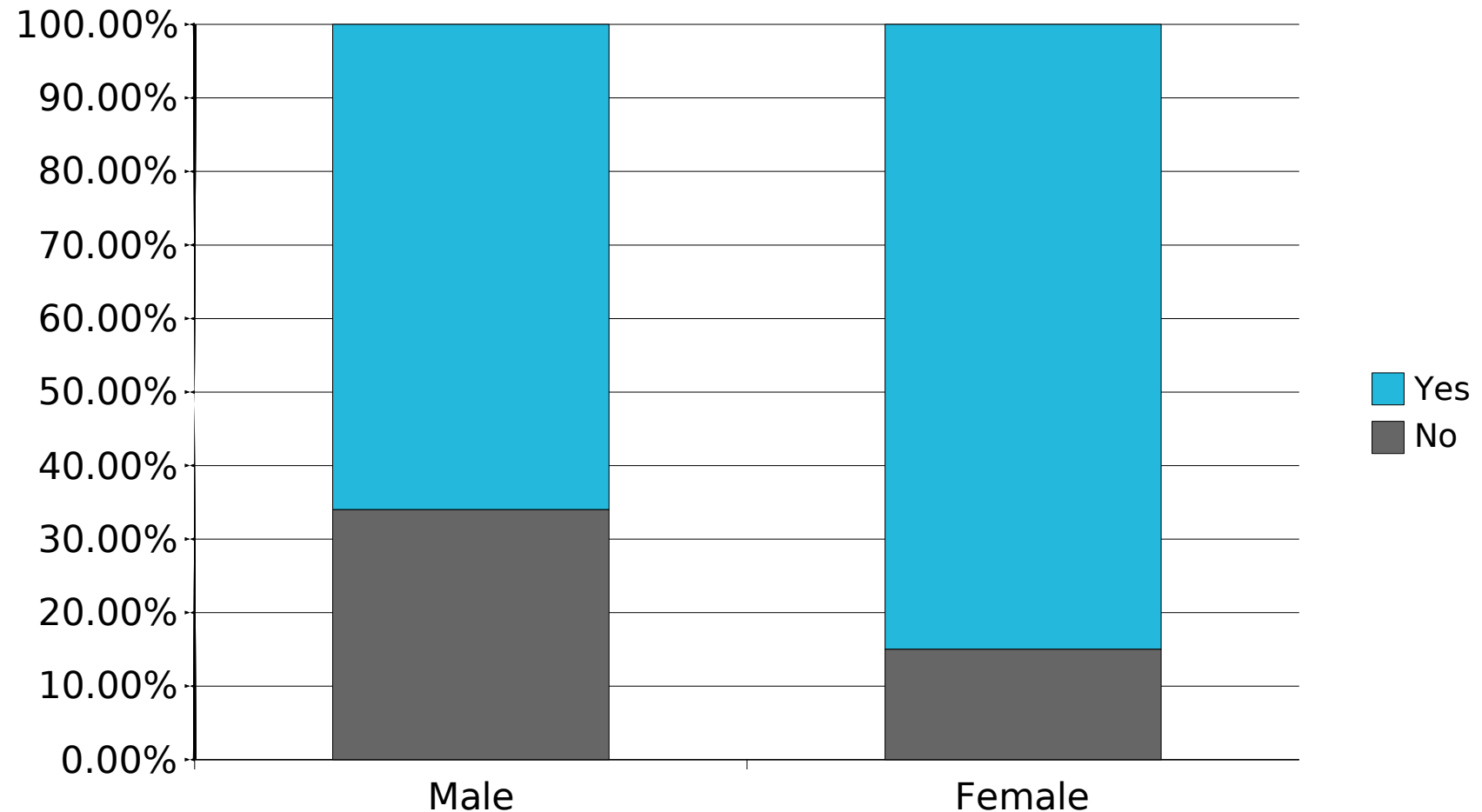
Gender Strand: Aims

- Produce first study of gender in F/LOSS
- Gather socioeconomic data
- Identify reasons for the gender gap
- Establish recommendations for change

Methodology

- Ethnography:
 - Unstructured and semi-structured interviews
 - Participant observation
- Quantitative methodology:
 - Online survey (1541 participants)

“Would more female participants be better for the whole F/LOSS community?”

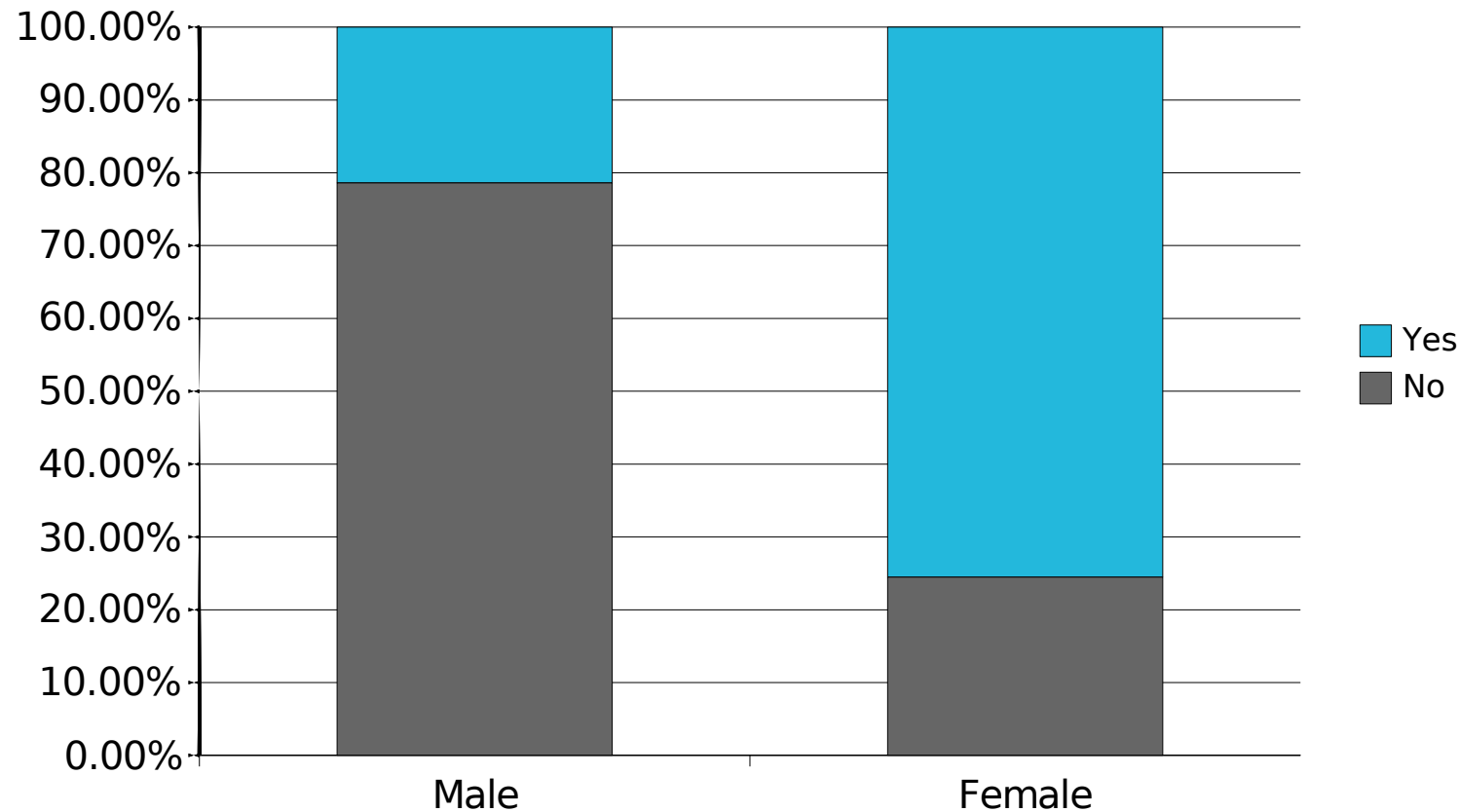


Are women just not interested in F/LOSS?
Are they being excluded?

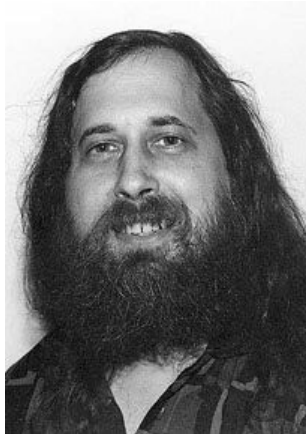
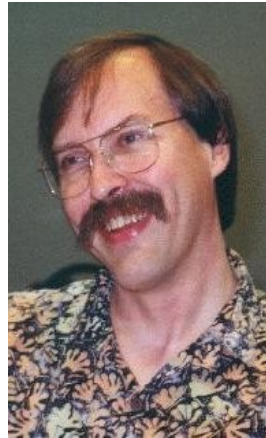
Unconscious Exclusion

- Joking about women
- Using “he” in documentation
- Assuming that society is gender-blind
- Viewing coding as superior to other skills

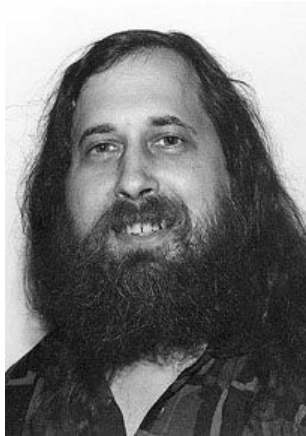
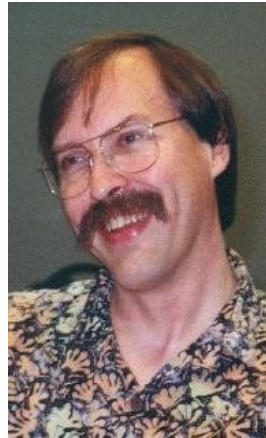
“Regarding the F/LOSS community as a whole, have you ever observed discriminatory behaviour toward women?”



Do I have to have a beard?



Do I have to have a beard?



Do women have as much experience with
computers?

Later, later, later...

	Male	Female
Age of first computer use	12	14.5
Age of first computer possession	15	19
Year of intial F/LOSS involvement	1996	1999

Is code the only thing that matters?

Typical Tasks

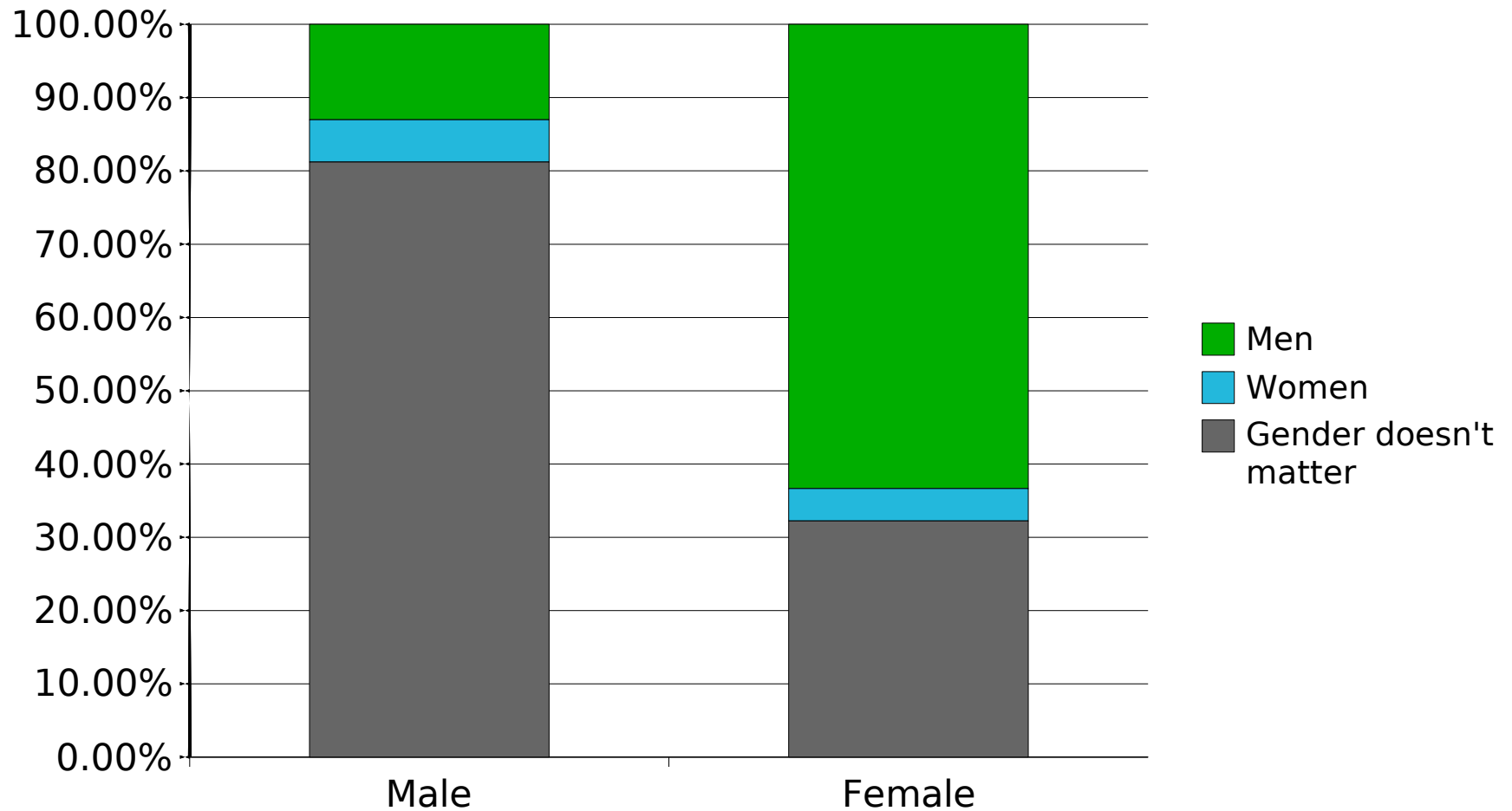
Men:

- Writing code
- Testing
- Bug reports
- “Technical tasks”?

Women:

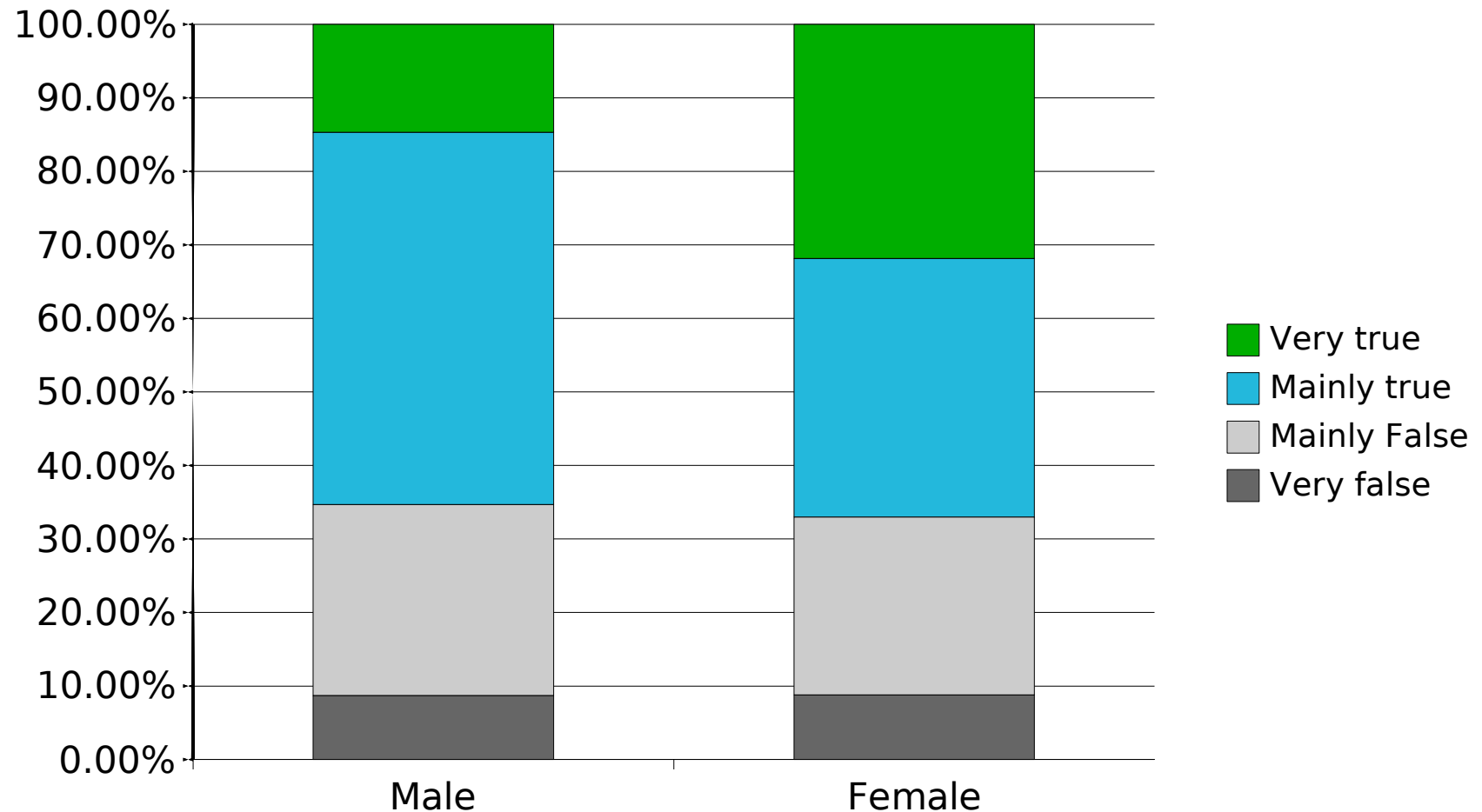
- Documentation
- Organising events
- Translation
- “Social tasks”?

“For whom is it easier to get acknowledgement for F/LOSS work?”

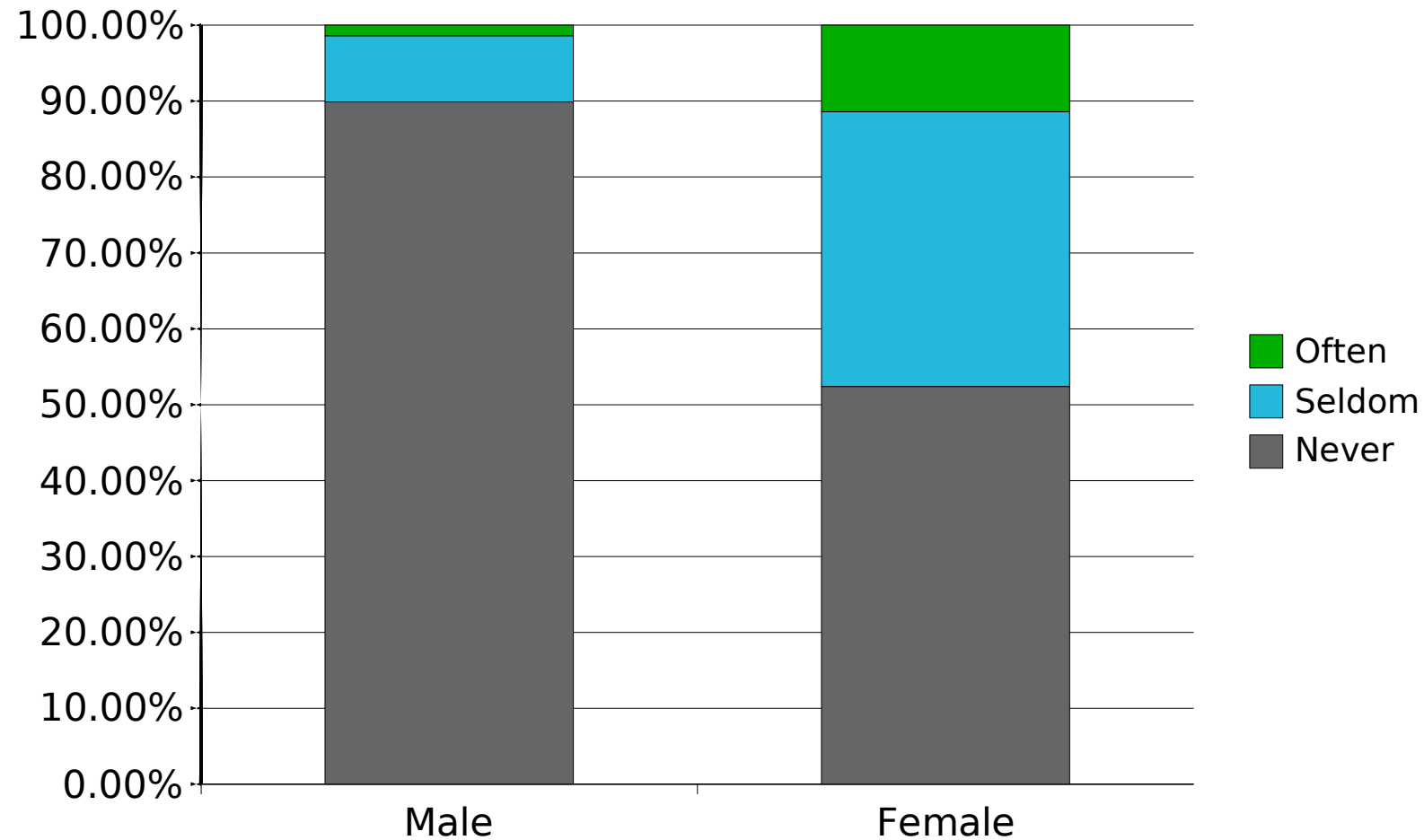


Do women get more attention for their
gender or their skills?

“Women often get more attention as a woman than as a F/LOSS participant.”



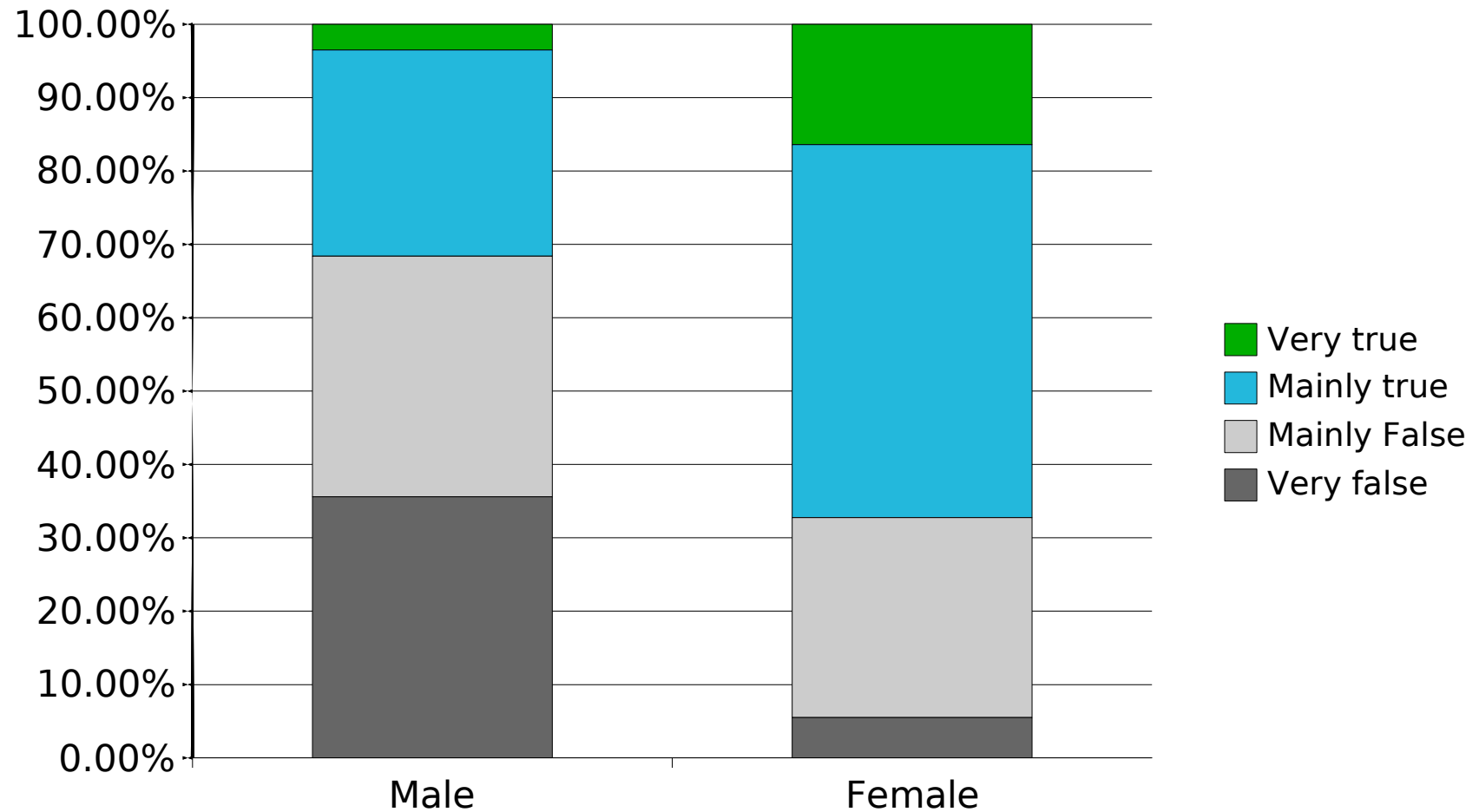
“Have you ever been asked on a date by another F/LOSS participant?”



Are there too many flamewars?

Do women have less time for F/LOSS?

“Do women have less time than men to participate in F/LOSS?”



Summary

- Unconscious exclusion
- Later involvement in computing
- More diverse skills
- Less time for F/LOSS

Women and men have very different
F/LOSS experiences

What Can Be Done? The Debian Women Project

Debian GNU/Linux

- Linux kernel, GNU OS tools
- >15,490 packages
- 100% “free” software
- Developed by a group of volunteers

“Universal Operating System”?



The Debian Women Project



- Founded in 2004
- First such project for a Linux distribution

What We Do

- Provide role models
- Give tutorials on Debian-related topics
- Mentoring project
- Presentations at conferences
- Word-of-mouth advocacy

Debian Women Isn't...

- A dating agency
- Solely concerned with support
- Segregated
- An “affirmative action” project
- Striving for a Disney-like atmosphere

Who Are We?



Unexpected Results

- Many men are actively involved
- Respect from the Debian community
- “Good for women = good for everyone”
- 12 women in the NM queue!

It's never too late to change the world!

Resources

- <http://flosspols.org/>
- <http://www.debian.org/>
- <http://women.alioth.debian.org/>
- <http://infohost.nmt.edu/~val/howto.html>